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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001092

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#) [TRT](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PLANS FOR THAKSIN'S OUSTER, TRANSITION

REF: A. BANGKOK 1034

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 0538

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The NGO alliance organizing Sunday's massive protest against Prime Minister Thaksin predicts a peaceful and successful rally which will unseat the PM. They expect the PM's ruling Thai Rak Thai party to crumble within several months, leading to new elections before the end of the year. This is a "best-case" scenario for the opposition, but it is not an unrealistic prediction. Thaksin is in real trouble. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) Polcouns met February 22 with Pittaya Wongkul, head of one of the NGOs in the "Alliance to Defend the Country," which is organizing Sunday's big protest rally against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Pittaya reviewed the reason why growing numbers of the public are opposed to Thaksin. Like other observers, he recognized that the issues that had animated NGO opposition to the PM, like press freedom, were not so important to the general public. The Shin Corp sale was the issue that was mobilizing the masses. They were concerned about selling off a key asset to foreigners, and they were angry about that Thaksin did not have to pay any taxes on his enormous gains. Pittaya pointed out that the authorities count the shirts for sale on the street vendor's table, and the number of bowls of soup the noodle shop sells in order to assess their taxes, but Thaksin will pay nothing on his 1.8 billion dollar deal.

[1](#)3. (C) Pittaya outlined the opposition plans for the demonstration on Sunday. The Alliance members planned to meet on February 23 to elect a steering committee for the rally. Media firebrand Sondhi Limthongkul, whose weekly protests started the ball rolling, and "Dharma Army" General Chamlong had pledged to work as part of a coalition with the lesser-known NGOs in the Alliance. The steering committee will make all the decisions on the rally, including a determination on who would speak on Sunday. This rally would not repeat the format of the previous protests, in which Sondhi essentially did a version of his talk show, dishing dirt on the PM and his family. Who turns up and who speaks will be an important indicator of the scope of opposition to Thaksin. We do not expect a final decision to be made until the last minute.

[1](#)4. (C) Pittaya confirmed that the opposition would not be satisfied with the dissolution of Parliament; they would insist on Thaksin's resignation. Pittaya expected Sunday's demonstration to be very effective. A small part of the demonstrators would camp out at the site (presumably led by Chamlong, whose "Dharma Army" organization has experience in staging days-long protests). Other participants would go to their jobs during the day and return to the protest rally in the evenings. He said that "if they could get 200,000 to 300,000 people to turn out on Sunday" then "Thaksin would resign within a couple of days." He predicted that other members of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party would not support the dissolution of Parliament for their own selfish reasons -- they don't want to be out of a job and have to campaign again in an uncertain environment. They will be prepared to sacrifice Thaksin.

[1](#)5. (C) Pittaya aid that the opposition was not terribly concerned about who would step in as Prime Minister after that. They presumed that one of the prominent TRT members would take on the job. In any case, he predicted, TRT would fall apart once Thaksin was gone. The Parliament would remain for a couple of months, focusing on making some changes to the Constitution as called for by many academics and political figures, and would head into new elections within six months. (Note: It is not yet clear exactly what changes to the Constitution have broad support. However, Pittaya probably has in mind measures to strengthen the independence of institutions like the National Counter-Corruption Commission, and changes to provisions that make it virtually impossible for MPs to change parties. end note.)

[1](#)6. (C) Pittaya emphasized that the organizers do not expect violence. They think that Thaksin supporters are contributing to rumors of possible trouble in order to scare people away from the protest. He said that the group was

working with local officials and would stay in touch with police to avoid misunderstandings. The government understand, Pittaya said, that the use of violence by security forces would only galvanize opposition to Thaksin.

17. (C) Comment: Septel provides our analysis of the serious challenge Thaksin faces. Pittaya's scenario reflects a "best-case" outcome for the opposition, but it is not completely unrealistic. It is notable that the plan does not require any intervention by the King -- it would simply allow the legal and constitutional mechanisms to play out. End Comment
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